

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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R 070637Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5245
INFO AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 18652

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SGEN, SHUM, UK, US, OTRA (SMYTH, WALTER AND
HARASZTI, ALEXANDER)
SUBJECT: BILLY GRAHAM CRUSADE REPRESENTATIVES RECEIVED
BY SOVIET OFFICIALS; POSSIBLE SOVIET INVITATION TO
CORETTA KING

REF: STATE 186079

1. SUMMARY: BILLY GRAHAM CRUSADE REPS ARE OPTIMISTIC
ABOUT CHANCES FOR GRAHAM "RELIGIOUS VISIT" TO USSR IN
1979, DESPITE SOVIET RELUCTANCE TO EXTEND OFFICIAL IN-
VITATION AT PRELIMINARY MEETINGS. SOVIETS ALSO RAISED
POSSIBILITY OF INVITING CORETTA KING TO THE USSR.
GRAHAM REPS MAY CONSULT DEPARTMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. ON AUGUST 2, EMBASSY OFFICERS MET WITH BILLY GRAHAM
CRUSADE REPRESENTATIVES DR. WALTER SMYTH AND DR.
ALEXANDER HARASZTI CONCERNING THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH
SOVIET OFFICIALS ON POSSIBLE VISIT BY BILLY GRAHAM
TO SOVIET UNION. SMYTH AND HARASZTI WERE HOSTED BY
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ALEKSEV BYCHKOV, GENERAL SECRETARY OF AUCECB (ALL-
UNION COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS-BAPTISTS),
AND MET WITH LEONID V. SHCHERBAKOV, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF
THE COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS' INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE.

3. SHCHERBAKOV SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE UP GRAHAM

VISIT PROPOSAL WITH HIGHER AUTHORITIES IN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND THEIR ANSWER WILL BE DELIVERED BY BYCHKOV IN NOVEMBER. IF INVITATION IS EXTENDED IT WILL BE FOR SEPTEMBER 1979.

4. SHCHERBAKOV ALSO ASKED HARASZTI TO QUERY MARTIN LUTHER KING, SR. AND CORETTA KING ABOUT "THEIR OPINIONS ON VISITING THE USSE." IF THEY WANT TO COME, SHCHERBAKOV SAID, THEIR VISIT WOULD BE EASY TO ARRANGE. HARASZTI DOUBTS MOTIVES FOR SOVIET SUGGESTION, AND WOULD LIKE TO CONSULT WITH DEPARTMENT BEFORE ACTING ON REQUEST. ALSO, BYCHKOV SUGGESTED MEETING BETWEEN AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN AND BILLY GRAHAM. SMYTH SAYS HE MAY CONTACT THE DEPARTMENT FOR HELP IN SETTING UP CALL ON DOBRYNIN.

5. IN CONSULTATION WITH AUCECB, GRAHAM REPS HAVE WORKED OUT GENERAL PROGRAM FOR VISIT, IN CASE IT ACTUALLY OCCURS. UNLIKE GRAHAM'S VISITS IN WESTERN COUNTRIES, TRIP TO USSR WILL NOT BE BILLED AS "CRUSADE" OR "CAMPAIGN", BUT INSTEAD AS "RELIGIOUS VISIT." IN LINE WITH SOVIET LAWS, GRAHAM WILL ABIDE BY FICTION THAT HE IS NOT COMING TO PROSELYTIZE, BUT ONLY TO WITNESS HIS OWN FAITH AND LEARN ABOUT RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. ALSO IN ACCORDANCE WITH SOVIET LAW, ANY CONFABS GRAHAM HAS WILL TAKE PLACE ON CHURCH PROPERTY, RATHER THAN IN STADIUMS OR AUDITORIUMS. GRAHAM REPS HARASZTI AND SMYTH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN SECURE ZAGORSK MONASTERY FOR THIS PURPOSE, SINCE ARCHIMANDRATE GEORGIY, WHO SHOWED THEM MONASTERY, WAS FAVORABLE TO IDEA. WHILE IN LENINGRAD AND KIEV, SMYTH AND HARASZTI WILL SEARCH FOR SUITABLE SITES SIMILAR TO ZAGORSK. ACCORDING TO GRAHAM REPS, GRAHAM WOULD ALSO PROBABLY BRING A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT.

6. SOVIET DBSTACLES ASIDE, SMYTH AND HARASZTI RECOGNIZE THAT THERE IS SIGNIFICANT RESISTANCE FROM U.S. CRITICS OVER PROPOSED VISIT, SINCE GRAHAM WOULD HAVE TO ADHERE TO SOVIET RELIGIOUS LAWS, AVOID UNOFFICIAL RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND REMAIN SILENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES.

7. GRAHAM REPS BELIEVE THEY CAN AVOID UNDERCUTTING UNOFFICIAL SOVIET RELIGIOUS GROUPS, ESPECIALLY AUCECB'S RIVAL CCECB, BY OBTAINING INVITATIONS FROM SEVERAL SOVIET RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND NOT JUST AUCECB ALONE. IN ADDITION, THEY BELIEVE THAT DRAWBACKS NOTED ARE OUTWEIGHED BY UNIQUE ADVANTAGES, SINCE:
-- FOR FIRST TIME SOVIETS WOULD HAVE ACCEPTED EVANGELIST VISIT;

-- VISIT WOULD PROVIDE VAST OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLICIZING
RELIGION IN USSR; AND
-- VISIT WOULD PROBABLY HAVE POSITIVE EFFECT ON US-
SOVIET RELATIONS.

8. COMMENT: IF VISIT DOES TAKE PLACE, DECISION TO
ALLOW IT WOULD REPRESENT SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN SOVIET
RELIGIOUS POLICY. GIVEN RESTRICTIONS UNDER WHICH
GRAHAM REPORTEDLY HAS AGREED TO OPERATE, SOVIET OFFICIALS
COULD POSSIBLY GO FOR VISIT PROPOSAL AS PLOY TO "DEMON-
STRATE" THAT FOREIGN AND HUMAN RIGHTS CRITICS ARE OVER-
STATING CASE. HOWEVER, SPECTACLE OF THOUSANDS OF WOR-
SHIPPERS FLOCKING TO EVANGELIST SERMON AT ZAGORSK IS

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ONE WHICH CERTAINLY CANNOT BE COMFORTING TO LEADERSHIP,
AND THIS FACTOR WILL WEIGH HEAVILY AGAINST GRAHAM AS
SOVIETS CONSIDER THEIR DECISION. TOON

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